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ABSTRACT

John Dewey High School, the first experimental non-graded school in New York City, is described in this article in terms of its educational philosophy and administrative procedures. With modular scheduling, five area resource centers, and innovative student evaluation procedures integrated into the program, the school views the concept of individualized progress and independent study as the cornerstone of its educational theory. The function of the Dewey Independent Study Kit (DISK) concept is related to the curricular options permitted the student. With French, Hebrew, Italian, and Spanish offered at three levels in the language program, the author describes the function and administration of the foreign language resource center. (RL)

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ADAPTING FOREIGN LANGUAGE PROGRAMS TO NEW EDUCATIONAL DESIGNS

Stephen L. Levy

John Dewey High School is the first experimental non-graded high school in New York City which opened in September of 1969 with an initial enrollment of 1000 students.

What are some of the experimental features of John Dewey High School? First, the school year is divided into 5 seven week cycles, each approximately 35 days in duration. Every seven weeks students and teachers receive new programs. An optional summer session provides a sixth cycle and thus the school is in operation almost all year. Second, the students and teachers have an eight hour day that is divided into 22 modules of 20 minute duration. Flexible scheduling allows for a break in the traditional class meeting five times per week for forty minutes. At John Dewey there are classes that meet for two consecutive modules per day (40 minutes); others meet for three modules (60 minutes); and others for four or five consecutive modules. Every twenty minutes there is a "beep" and somewhere in the building some classes are ending. Programming of this type lessens traffic in the halls as the entire school does not move together every twenty minutes.

The eight hour day gives each student time for "Independent Study". These are modules on the pupil's program when he is free to choose how he will spend his time. The amount of independent study time varies from pupil to pupil depending on how many subjects he is taking. Where can the pupil go during this independent study time? Each subject area has its own Resource Center which is a satellite library, an audio-visual center, a place to get tutorial help, to do homework or to work on an advanced individual project. These centers are manned by educational assistants who are responsible for books, equipment and decorum. An informal teaching-learning situation exists in the resource center between the pupils and the teachers who serve there.

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Built around the resource centers are five classrooms with movable walls to provide for large and small group instruction. Three of these classrooms have windows that face into the resource center and the teacher can encourage individual progress by sending pupils into the center to complete a specific task while she works with the other students. At the same time, she is able to monitor them through the glass.

The two basic cornerstones of John Dewey High School are individual progress and independent study. How are these two concepts achieved? By the division of the year into 5 seven week cycles, the student must complete a phase of work and receive the grade of Mastery or Mastery With Condition to be permitted to go on to the next phase. A student who has not achieved one of these grades is rated "R" (Retention for Reinforcement) and he is programmed for the phase of work he did not master. For every student who receives Mastery With Condition or Retention, the teacher must write a prescription in which she lists the areas of weakness of the pupil and suggestions for improvement. The "MC" student goes into the next phase of the course. The "R" student is held back but retention is only for 7 weeks rather than for six months or a year as is done in some schools. The prescriptions are completed in triplicate - one copy is sent to the parent, the second copy is kept in the resource center and the third copy is sent to the pupil's guidance counselor. It is through the prescription that remedial help is offered to the student. There is also the grade of "MI", Mastery in Independent Study. This bring us to the other cornerstone, Independent Study. Independent Study is a concept by which a student can take a phase of work on his own, working with a DISK (Dewey Independent Study Kit). At the end of the phase the student is tested to see if he has mastered the material of the phase of work. If he has met the requirements of his DISK and receives mastery, his grade is "MI". The student has the opportunity to take courses that may not fit into his program, begin courses that interest him and even begin a second foreign language as a freshman.

As mentioned earlier, students and teachers receive new programs every 7 weeks. Most of the teachers and administrators believe that this is one of the strengths of the experiment. Teachers must account more readily for the work accomplished in 7 weeks and there can be no lag in the momentum of learning. The cycles usually end on Friday and the new cycle begins on Monday with a full day of classes. This is possible because the program is done by computer with the services provided by Brooklyn College. The fact that teachers will have to make judgments and evaluate their students in a matter of weeks makes them get to know their students more rapidly. Both must perform during the 7 weeks.

Now that you are familiar with the structure of John Dewey High School, let's see how the foreign language program fits into this framework. Language study is offered in French, Hebrew, Italian and Spanish. These languages are offered in formal classes because the students who make up our student body come with backgrounds in these languages from the lower schools or they selected these languages for study at John Dewey. Three levels of instruction in each of the languages are offered and Level III in French and Spanish has been extended into 7 cycles rather than five in order to meet the individual needs of some of our students. Almost every student who is enrolled at Dewey is studying a foreign language. There is no tracking for academic, commercial or general type courses. Those students who would not have studied a foreign language had they gone to a traditional high school have been offered a course called Conversational Spanish. Here the spoken language is stressed as well as the cultural aspects of the Spanish speaking people. There is a minimum of writing and the students work with dialogues, games, role-playing and related activities. We have also begun a similar course in Conversational Italian.

Total meeting time for each class still equals 200 minutes per week although the division of time may vary. For example, classes in Levels II and III meet four times per week: two days for 2 modules (40 minutes) and two days for 3 modules (60 minutes). The Level I classes meet five times per week for

two modules. The longer period for the more advanced classes lends itself very favorably to lessons such as reading, civilization and dramatization. The teacher is able to complete the activity in one class rather than having to hold something over for the next lesson.

The Foreign Language Resource Center is manned throughout the day by language teachers and an educational assistant. Student teachers and student tutors also augment the staff in the Resource Center. The pupils who received "MC" in the preceding cycle are required to attend the resource center for help for a minimum of three modules per week. These students are in the next phase of the course although they had certain deficiencies or weaknesses in language study. They receive credit for their attendance in the center after thay have worked with the teacher. She gives them help after consulting the pupil's prescription. Pupils who were retained during the preceding phase are required to attend the resource center for help for a minimum of one module per week. These students are already in special classes and are receiving help according to their individual needs. Naturally, a student may come to the center more frequently if he chooses. The one-to-one relationship in the resource center between a pupil and a teacher who is not necessarily his language teacher, establishes a comfortable atmosphere for learning and also excites pupil interest in the language courses.

Students may also choose to study a foreign language that is not not offered in a formal class. Several students have elected to study German and Russian on their own. To help achieve this, funds are available to bring in outside consultants in these languages whenever the members of the staff are not qualified in the language. Students may also begin a second language in independent study. One teacher in the department receives an allowance and serves as the independent study coordinator. She meets with each student for one "mod" per week and goes over the exercises and dialogues the students have prepared. When the student completes the requirements of his DISK (Dewey Independent Study Kit) he is given an examination and is permitted to go on to the next phase of the language if he has mastered the preceding one.

The language laboratory has been installed and we are making it an integral part of our program. Each class is assigned to use the lab and it is also available as a library for the students studying a language independently and for those desiring additional practice.

To my mind, John Dewey High School is the school of the '70's for it represents a step forward in the educational process with emphasis on the individual student through provision for individual progress and independent study without the stigma of competitive grades. Both students and teachers want John Dewey to succeed and we are working together to make this happen. The general impression of most visitors is that there is a milieu of lightness, friendliness and high interest on the part of the students and the faculty.